

INTER OFFICE MEMO

FEB 13 1974 *Felt*
Vinyl chloride
at

TO Dr. R. Henderson, Dr. M. AT
Gasque, W. Dugle, G. J. Henrich, J. J. McHugh
FROM J. J. Hanrahan AT Stamford

DATE February 12, 1974

COPY TO C. E. Ridenour
H. H. Kerr
A. Baker

SUBJECT

Attached is a copy of an article which appeared in the Kentucky Labor News of February 2, 1974, in which Mr. Peter Bommarito, President of the United Rubber Workers, views with alarm the VCM situation at Goodrich and the other producers. This is not much more than a repetition of his comments which appeared in the Wall Street Journal last month, but addressees may be interested in the reference to the study being conducted at the University of North Carolina.

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Att.

OLI 1117

Asbestos

International labor standards on the safe use of asbestos should be created as soon as possible, according to a committee of experts which met at the International Labor Office in Geneva. In the meantime research should be continued into the ways in which asbestos fibres cause injury, said the experts, who reviewed current knowledge of the effects of asbestos dust and viable preventive measures.

It is well established that exposure to asbestos dust in the workplace has caused serious diseases, and there is evidence that the prevalence of diseases is related to the intensity and duration of exposure.

The experts underlined the fundamental importance of regular monitoring of the working environment to determine those levels of asbestos fibre concentration which can lead to asbestosis, those which can lead to lung cancer or to mesothelioma, and those which can lead to cancers spreading over the surface of the lung and the internal organs.

The prevention of harmful dust emission is complicated because of the wide range of products containing asbestos, and the variety of its uses. The use of safer substitute materials is desirable.

After examining different technical prevention measures — suppression, enclosure and mechanization of work processes, personal protection — the experts said a high standard of industrial supervision should be maintained to ensure the best protection for exposed workers. They stressed the need for efforts to correlate dust exposure to different types of asbestos with the development of symptoms.

The experts attached great importance to the need for a full understanding of the asbestos hazard by all persons concerned, both within and outside the undertaking.

They recommended that the ILO prepare a guide on the safe use of asbestos, and issue the report of the meeting to ILO member governments, and through them to employers and workers, and to all interested organizations.

Occupational Hazards . . .

Polyvinyl Chloride

By Peter Boonmarito
URW International President

An insidious recently recognized occupational health disease has been reported by the B. F. Goodrich's director of Environmental Health, Dr. Maurice N. Johnson.

An extremely high incidence of a rare and deadly liver cancer was found in Goodrich's Polyvinyl Chloride plant in Louisville, Ky.

Since 1968, four documented cases of angiosarcoma of the liver and related deaths have occurred in this Kentucky plant, employing about 1,200 workers. Of these, some 270 workers could have a direct exposure to chemical agents used in the production of polyvinyl chloride. Most startling is the fact that in the entire country, only 21 deaths per year are recognized and diagnosed as angiosarcoma. This physical response has never been reported as being related to polyvinyl chloride manufacture.

A specific causative agent, as yet, has not been identified, but could be related to vinyl chloride or other chemicals used in the polymerization of the polyvinyl chloride resin.

Although none of the B. F. Goodrich plants producing this material are organized by the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum and Plastic Workers of America, AFL-CIO, CLC, many other plants involved with polyvinyl chloride production do employ members of the URW. This recent information could directly affect our membership, as its impact could be worldwide.

My initial approach to this situation will be to call on URW officials and companies involved with polyvinyl chloride manufacture to meet with B. F. Goodrich and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) officials for a briefing of the problem.

As chairman of the Industrial Union Department's Health and Safety Committee, I expect to set up a conference with the other international union presidents whose members could also be involved, and our goal will be to establish an approach to study and evaluate the impact of this cancer on workers and a policy related to worker protection and monitoring.

Our membership is immediately being informed of the hazard reportedly related to polyvinyl chloride handling and production, and I have assigned our director of Industrial Hygiene, Louis S. Beliczky, to initiate an immediate investigation to obtain objective data to fully document and define the problem as it affects our workers.

As part of our negotiated Joint Occupational Health Program, the University of North Carolina has already initiated a crash epidemiological study of the locals involved with polyvinyl chloride production and more comprehensive investigations will be designed in the near future.

Fast responsible action is mandatory to avert a catastrophe in this modern industrial world.